

WHO KILLED KESHER'S RABBI?

Parts 1 and 2

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An Open Door

THE DOOR WAS AJAR.

That was the first thing Howard Smith noticed when he arrived at the pale brown townhouse on 25th Street NW, a stop he did not intend to make on the cold, clear morning of Feb. 29, 1984. The home sat just across the M Street Bridge and a short walk from Georgetown in Foggy Bottom, but it was located on a quiet, low-key block that felt a world away from the tony homes in the popular Washington neighborhood.

Smith, an up-and-coming astrophysicist working at the U.S. Naval Research Laboratory, was already running late for work, but that wasn't unusual for him that year. His mother had died a few months before, and Jewish law dictates that the immediate family members of the deceased should recite the Mourner's *Kaddish* prayer every day for 11 months following the death. Each morning, he walked to Keshet Israel Congregation, a small Orthodox synagogue in Georgetown, and joined its daily *minyan*, or prayer service. His colleagues knew that he often arrived at the office after 9 a.m.

On that day, he wouldn't get to work until well into the afternoon. First, he would make a gruesome discovery that would shock Washington and reverberate in Jewish communities around the world.

Normally, the congregation's longtime rabbi, Philip Rabinowitz, would arrive before the morning prayers started, but sometimes — when the assembled group was especially prompt — he got there a few minutes late. Rabinowitz never skipped the service entirely.

The morning *minyan* required a prayer quorum of 10 men, and that morning, only nine men showed up, with the rabbi nowhere to be found. Someone called Rabinowitz to see if he could come to fill out the group. When he didn't answer, the congregants grew concerned.

Most of them had to head off to work or to drop their kids at school. Smith, along with a Department of Energy attorney and two of the synagogue's unhurried retirees, drove the five blocks to Rabinowitz's home and walked up to the door.

Smith paused when he saw that the door was not closed. The rabbi would not purposely have left it unlocked; he always kept it dead-bolted shut, fearful of intruders.

Something was wrong.

One of the other men had a heart condition, so Smith urged the group to wait outside while he ventured indoors. He walked haltingly up the rickety stairs above the basement apartment to the front door

and gingerly pressed on the door. Smith cried out when he stepped inside.

RABINOWITZ lay face down on the floor of his study. Someone — likely someone he knew, police would later argue — had stabbed and bludgeoned him several times.

The rabbi and scholar was dead. He was 63.

No murder weapon would ever be found. The only item missing from the house, friends and family members would later notice, was the knife Rabinowitz used to perform ritual circumcisions. This struck them as more than a coincidence.

Rabinowitz was a man who had escaped antisemitic pogroms in Poland and lived a quiet, humble life in the face of unspeakable tragedies: his parents and siblings murdered by Nazis, the sudden death of his wife, Selma, at their daughter's wedding six years before. Synagogue members came to view him as a tragic figure. Despite it all, Rabinowitz fought to keep traditional Judaism alive in the nation's capital as most of Washington's Jews moved en masse further from the heart of the city or to the suburbs. Even as the neighborhood around him changed, and crime rates in Washington rose, the rabbi never faltered in his conviction that helping others was the pinnacle of his Judaism,

which saw that each person was created in God's image. *V'ahavta l'reacha kamocha* — love your fellow man as yourself.

Did that biblical teaching, central to Rabinowitz's worldview, lead the rabbi to his death?

IT'S BEEN NEARLY 40 YEARS since Rabbi Rabinowitz's murder, an event that continues to cast a dark pall over the synagogue. In that time, the neighborhood around Rabinowitz's home has changed dramatically, morphing from a quiet and at times seedy college neighborhood to a gentrifying block flanked by a Trader Joe's grocery store and a high-end sushi restaurant featuring a \$200 tasting menu. The synagogue itself has utterly transformed, too, from a small, tight-knit community far from the hub of D.C. Jewish life to an influential and well-regarded institution central to Washington Jewry.

In the days and weeks after Rabinowitz's murder, the police acted quickly, confident that the killer would be found. That confidence would crumble as the years wore on, and no arrests have ever been made. Today, police tell *JI* that the case isn't officially closed but won't say whether any detectives are still following leads.

In recent years, it has sometimes seemed as if it's open season on synagogues in America. In 2009, the FBI foiled a terrorist bomb plot to blow up temples in Riverdale, N.Y. In the fall of 2018, a man toting a military-style assault rifle and yelling antisemitic slurs murdered 11 worshippers during morning prayers at a Pittsburgh synagogue. Months later, a shooter opened fire at a synagogue in Poway, Calif., killing one and injuring three others. A rabbi was killed in December 2019 when a man barged into a Hanukkah party in a private home in Monsey, N.Y., and stabbed five people. And in January 2022, a British Pakistani man armed with a pistol stormed into a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, and took four congregants, including its rabbi, hostage.

Those attacks have hit the American Jewish community hard, but the perpetrators' antisemitic motivations offer something of an answer for their heinous crimes. But what about what appears to be a senseless act of urban violence like the one

that befell Rabinowitz? No answer exists for congregants at Keshet Israel, even though there is speculation that the rabbi may have known his killer. The emotional wounds from the murder continue to cut deep at the congregation, nearly 40 years on. Writer Leon Wieseltier, a longtime congregant who joined the synagogue more than a decade after Rabinowitz's murder, told *JI*, "It's part of the ethos of the place."

TO ATTEMPT to understand Rabinowitz's death, it's instructive to first learn the story of his life. As the spiritual leader of a tight-knit Orthodox *shul* — Yiddish for synagogue — his life was not just his own. So too his death, and the mourning that followed, was shared by the many people who had called him a rabbi and a teacher over the years.

He led prayer services three times a day and made himself available to anyone who had religious queries. During the so-called "lean years" of the 1950s and 1960s, when the synagogue regularly struggled to reach the prayer quorum, Rabinowitz kept in his Rolodex a list of Jewish men who lived nearby; he would call them and tell them to come, quick, to help make a *minyan*, always apologizing profusely before making the ask. When the synagogue's coffers were nearly empty, he picked up a second job teaching at the nearby Hebrew Academy school. Much of his time was spent visiting convalescent congregants in area nursing homes and hospitals.

"Everybody liked him. He was a very gentle person," Smith, now an astrophysicist and lecturer at Harvard and the Smithsonian Institution, told *Jewish Insider* in an interview late last year.

At just over 5-foot-2, the mustachioed Rabinowitz was not an imposing figure. He was not the kind of rabbi whose booming voice filled the far reaches of the sanctuary. He interspersed his long, sometimes rambling sermons with Yiddish.

"You could hardly see him over the *bimah* [pulpit], and he had such a strong accent. I didn't understand a word of what he said," said Howard Rosen, an economist who is now the unofficial leader of "Keshet East," a group of synagogue alumni who live in Israel and gather annually to mark Rabinowitz's passing at his gravesite.

"He was so charming," said Sara Averick, a public relations executive who moved to Israel after living in Washington in her 20s. She recalled one of Rabinowitz's slightly off-color jokes, which managed to make use of erudite Jewish concepts in a way that poked fun at one of Keshet's older congregants. It was the man's 75th birthday, and Rabinowitz used *gematria* — the practice of assigning numerical values to Hebrew letters — to point out that 75 corresponded to the Hebrew letters *ayin*, which is 70, and *hay*, which is five.

"Some people think *ayin hay* is *alav ha'shalom*, but no!" Rabinowitz cried with a mischievous smile.

It was an esoteric joke about old age, but an effective one for the learned crowd: *Alav ha'shalom* is a Hebrew phrase, translated as "peace be upon him," and roughly equivalent in usage to "rest in peace." The two words start with the same letters, *ayin* and *hay*, that represent the number 75.

"He rolled his eyes afterward, like, 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe I said that,'" Averick recalled. "It was so funny."

He was like "a rabbinic Yogi Berra," Rosen added. "I mean, he used to say crazy, amazing, things, great lines."

Rabinowitz was not easily impressed by the political power brokers who came to Keshet when they passed through the nation's capital. Several people pointed out that Rabinowitz would introduce any attorney who belonged to the synagogue as a "prominent Washington lawyer," usually with a smirk. When Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan came to Keshet in 1978 for Yom Kippur, days after the signing of the Camp David Accords, Rabinowitz was unfazed by the famous Israeli general. Rabinowitz asked Dayan to open the ark, a key part of the Shabbat service before the Torah is removed, and he initially said no — but Rabinowitz would not take no for an answer, even from the esteemed guest.

RABINOWITZ grew up in a town next to Łomża, Poland, a small city located between Warsaw and Białystok. Before World War II, it was home to a major yeshiva and housed a grand synagogue designed by a renowned Italian architect. Jews comprised more than one-third of Łomża's population in the 1930s.

One of Rabinowitz's brothers had already gone to what was then Palestine; Łomża was an early Zionist hub, and the Łomża Yeshiva even opened a location in Petach Tikvah that still operates today.

By the end of the war, no Jews would remain in Łomża. Many had been shot in mass graves in a forest outside the city, while others were killed in concentration camps. Rabinowitz's parents were murdered by Nazis. *Hashem yikom damam*, he would say when he spoke of them. May God avenge their blood.

When Rabinowitz left home in 1938 to study in the United States, he changed his name from the Polish-inflected Fiszel Rabinowicz to Philip Rabinowitz and enrolled at the Hebrew Theological College in Skokie, Ill. His time there influenced him heavily — it's where Rabinowitz was steeped in the values of the *Mussar* movement, a religious tradition that emphasized the importance of both Torah learning and ethics.

For someone like Rabinowitz, "the worst crime," Reuven Schlenker explained, "was to embarrass somebody publicly."

"I thought he was exemplary," said Schlenker, a university librarian and *sofer*, or Torah scribe, who attended Keshet in the early 1980s. "I thought, 'Boy, I wish I could do that.' I'm not that quality."

DAYS BEFORE Rabbi Philip Rabinowitz was stabbed to death, he received the best kind of news: His daughter Miriam had given birth to a baby girl. The rabbi was supposed to attend the baby's naming ceremony days later.

The birth would be welcome news for any grandparent, but for Rabinowitz, it carried a special significance. It was a miracle, really, for Miriam to bring a child into the world after what happened at her wedding six years before.

Miriam Rabinowitz had a summer wedding on a humid August day in 1978, just weeks after her brother Asher got married in New Jersey. Because Miriam's wedding took place in Washington, it was a raucous synagogue affair — not just for family and personal friends but for the wide network of Keshet Israel Congregation members and their families, who were invited to attend the *tisch* and *bedeken*.

Miriam was holding court at her *bedeken*, a celebration that comes prior to the official ceremony at a traditional Jewish wedding. The Yiddish word means "to veil," and the ceremony culminates with the groom coming and putting the veil on his bride. The practice, which is meant to confirm the identity of the bride, comes from the biblical story of Jacob being tricked into marrying Leah, rather than his intended bride, Rachel. The *bedeken* is the first time the couple are intended to see each other on the day of their wedding.

Typically, a bride sits between her mother and soon-to-be mother-in-law, and women approach the bride to extend their congratulation wishes. Elsewhere in the banquet hall, at the *tisch*, the groom and the male guests sit around a large table, sharing words of Torah.

Ellen Epstein, who was active at Keshet and one of the few synagogue members to befriend the rabbi's wife, stood in the receiving line that night. "I was talking to the woman behind me, and then all this commotion and pandemonium broke out," Epstein recalled. Selma, the bride's mother, had fallen to the ground soon after she came into the room.

"She walked into the *bedeken* and took about three steps and then just collapsed," said Irving Haber, a physicist who was the synagogue vice president at the time.

Ambulances arrived quickly, and Selma was carted to the hospital, but it was too late. She died there, just as her daughter was preparing to walk down the aisle at the wedding venue.

"It never, never, never entered my mind that she had died," Epstein said. But that was the truth, leaving the rabbi — now widowed on the evening of his daughter's wedding — to make a horrible choice. He decided not to tell his own daughter, whose wedding it was, and proceed with the ceremony.

"The rabbi called the other rabbis in the area and they said they should go on with the wedding. So he went through the wedding not telling anyone of his family, even though he knew the prognosis was quite grim," Haber recalled.

The few who knew about the direness of the situation spoke almost in code. Ellen and her husband, David, learned of Selma's passing only obliquely through a

conversation at the wedding with a fellow congregant about vacation plans. David told one of the synagogue leaders that he and Ellen planned to take their young children to the beach the next morning.

"I wouldn't go if I were you," the other congregant said. It was a nod at the truth; no one wanted to say out loud what had happened to Selma while still at her daughter's wedding. So the Epsteins went home after the wedding and stayed in town, in case they would have to attend a funeral the next day.

The celebratory wedding dances continued as usual, but Rabinowitz sat on the sidelines, feigning tiredness rather than grief. A Jew who is mourning the death of an immediate family member is expected to avoid dancing at festivities like weddings and bar mitzvahs during their year-long mourning period.

"He didn't tell his daughter. He didn't tell anybody. He just stood there, and people would be dancing, and they wouldn't be looking at him. So he wouldn't let on," said Toby Grauman, a lawyer and rabbi who was close to the rabbi.

WHEN MIRIAM asked her father about her mother, his answer was like a riddle.

"She's in God's hand," Rabinowitz told Miriam.

"It was both accurate in his worldview and also not alarming," David Epstein told *Jewish Insider* in the attic office of Epstein's Chevy Chase, Md., home, surrounded by Judaica and souvenirs from his travels around the world. (David, a Texan by birth and by nature, was not wearing his usual cowboy hat on the day of the interview.) After Rabinowitz was killed, David served as the synagogue's liaison to the police, and he still has in his office a thick manila envelope stuffed with newspaper clippings, correspondence and notes from the year following the rabbi's death.

"That's an extraordinary strength," Grauman said of the rabbi's actions at Miriam's wedding. "Can you imagine the tragedy of someone, for that to happen at that moment, and then later, his own life ends in such tragedy? I mean, you can't write that story. You can't make it up. It's an incredible story of tragedy for someone who escaped the tragedies of Europe."

Miriam declined *Jewish Insider's* request for an interview.

INSIDE THE SANCTUARY at Keshet Israel, a plaque next to the *bimah* honors Rabinowitz. It's been there for decades in this building that is nearly 100 years old and far too small — the main sanctuary, with the original wooden, leather-backed seats and green stained glass windows, seats less than 250 people.

"He exemplified devotion to Torah with acts of loving-kindness for all whose lives he

touched," the plaque's inscription reads.

In Hebrew, there's a phrase that Jews often use to memorialize the dead: "May their memory be a blessing." On the plaque, Keshet's boosters took the saying one step further. "May the memory of the righteous be a blessing," it reads, regarding the esteemed rabbi.

But there is one other phrase, too, that is sometimes used, with a much darker connotation: "May God avenge their blood." Rabinowitz used this language when he spoke about his family members who had

been slaughtered in the Holocaust.

Many of the people who knew Rabinowitz well and were present at Keshet in the days and months after his murder still use that expression today when they speak of him. *Hashem yikom damo*. May God avenge his blood.

Those same people — the most loyal members of the Keshet community — claim to know who killed Rabinowitz.

The police never made an arrest. But they also never closed the case. ♦

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'Holiest of All Things'

THE FIRST THING VISITORS TO RABBI PHILIP RABINOWITZ'S HOME NOTICED WAS THE BOOKS.

Ratty paperbacks and small pocket-sized prayerbooks and gorgeous leather tomes, with titles in English, Hebrew and Yiddish. They covered the walls, the desk in his study and the stairs. There wasn't enough space for everything he wanted to learn. There wouldn't be time, either.

On the morning of Feb. 29, 1984, the rabbi's blood was splattered across the bookshelves and on top of a stack of papers on his desk. It covered a tan rug in the center of the study and a chair behind the desk. Nothing was out of place; the three-story townhouse had not been ransacked. Whoever had entered the home was not a thief — nothing of value was stolen.

Howard Smith didn't notice any of this at first. All he saw when he walked through the open front door at 8:15 a.m. was a figure lying

facedown on the floor. His first thought was that the 63-year-old rabbi had passed out and fallen unconscious. Smith hurried to the phone on the rabbi's desk and dialed 911. He hoped the rabbi could still be saved, but the stillness of the scene signaled otherwise.

WITHIN THE DECADE, Washington would gain a reputation as the nation's "murder capital." But in 1984, the city's homicide count hadn't yet begun to spike. Ambulances and police cruisers arrived swiftly, blue lights flashing and sirens blaring. Medics brought Rabinowitz's body to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, near the city jail, by ambulance. They pronounced him dead at 11:30 a.m. Police officers later estimated he had died around 8 p.m. the night before.

Smith, the young NASA astrophysicist who was a regular at Rabinowitz's daily *minyan* that year, walked outside to the three other men from the synagogue who

had accompanied him to Rabinowitz's home. Their faces were ashen. They had heard him gasp.

"Go back to the shul," Smith told them. "We have to tell people."

Smith went with the police back to the station, where he filled out a police report and answered a few questions. He never heard from anyone from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) again.

A spokesperson for MPD declined to make any department officials available for an interview about this case or about the department's cold case investigations, and the department denied *Jewish Insider's* Freedom of Information Act request for documents related to the police investigation.

"This case remains under investigation, however, there are no active leads we are currently pursuing in this case. We have spoken with witnesses and actively investigated over the years," MPD public

affairs specialist Alaina Gertz told JI in an emailed statement in December. “What we do know is that the Rabbi was in good-standing and well-respected in the community, and appears to not have been involved in any crime-related activity that we’re aware of.”

THE MEN walked into Keshet Israel Congregation and headed to the social hall and small kitchen, where a group of women was preparing for a lunch the synagogue planned to host that afternoon for the chief rabbi of the Israeli army. Nancy James glanced up at the men.

She and her husband, Bruce, had met through the synagogue years earlier at a picnic on Lag BaOmer, a Jewish holiday celebrated in the spring with picnics and bonfires. Bruce, who was in law school when they met, performed as a magician in his spare time. He came to the picnic straight from a gig at a Chabad house in the suburbs and ended up doing magic at Keshet, too. (“I thought he was so weird coming to a picnic in a three-piece suit. I said, ‘This guy is a nut,’” Nancy recalled later.)

The couple married in 1982 and became one of Keshet’s most involved couples. They drafted the synagogue newsletter each week. Three days before Rabinowitz died, they brought him a draft to review, as they did every week. That day he said something unexpected.

“He sort of gave us a *bracha*,” Nancy recalled, using the Hebrew word for blessing. “He said, ‘You’re going to have a beautiful child with beautiful eyes.’” Nancy had been experiencing fertility problems, and she found out she was pregnant with their first and only child soon after Rabinowitz died.

On that February morning, Nancy eyed the men who had just arrived back at synagogue. They looked distraught.

“Did you find the rabbi?” she asked. The men nodded yes, unable to say anything else.

“Is everything alright?” They shook their heads no. They could not find the words to tell her that their beloved teacher was dead.

THE NEWS BEGAN TO SPREAD, rippling out through the Washington area, the country and across the globe. The small group at the synagogue took turns making

phone calls to friends and congregants. Former students in New York and a synagogue board member visiting family in Ohio got calls. The board president, who was on a cross-country flight, arrived home to find notes stuffed under his door telling him to go straight to the synagogue. Someone must have called the rabbi’s son in New Jersey, his daughter in Chicago and his brother in Israel, but no one can remember who.

One of the first people to hear about the rabbi was Toby Grauman, the lawyer who was also an ordained rabbi. Everyone at Keshet called him Tuvia, his Hebrew name. In the year and a half between the rabbi’s murder and the hiring of a new rabbi, Grauman would step in as an interim spiritual leader, tending to the community’s religious needs and shepherding them through a year of mourning.

Grauman got the call at his law office and immediately went to the crime scene, which had been cordoned off with police tape. The body had already been taken to the morgue, which concerned Grauman. He walked up to the first police officer he saw.

“Under Jewish law,” Grauman told the detective, “autopsies are forbidden.”

“Well,” the officer responded, “we’re going to have to do something, because it’s a homicide.” Washington law requires that an autopsy be conducted whenever there is a violent death. But Orthodox Jewish scholars interpret Jewish law as prohibiting autopsies except in the most extreme circumstances. Desecration of a dead body is forbidden because, the logic goes, humans are created in the image of God.

GRAUMAN went to the morgue and set up what he called a “triage” with an Orthodox pathologist at an area hospital and a rabbinic authority on the phone from New York. Grauman stood at a distance, watching as the medical examiner cut into the rabbi’s body.

The Jewish principle also holds that, as much as is possible, every part of the body must be buried together — including any blood that was lost in a violent death. The bloodstained portions of the carpet in Rabinowitz’s study were cut out to be saved, and Grauman gathered any blood that dripped onto the operating table during

the autopsy. The surgical gloves and gowns of the doctors who performed the autopsy were also preserved and buried with the rabbi.

“They had to do what they had to do, but they did it in a very honorable sort of way. They appreciated what we needed and we understood what they needed,” Grauman said later.

The process was not entirely as smooth as Grauman remembered.

Four months after the murder, the deputy medical examiner, Douglas Dixon, resigned, citing undue political pressure on him in the position — including from the mayor’s assistant on religious affairs, who had mediated between Grauman and Dixon over how to conduct the autopsy. “There was a time during that day when I was prepared to take off my gloves and walk out, resigning not only as acting chief but as deputy medical examiner as well, in protest over what I consider to be an extremely dangerous meddling,” Dixon told *The Washington Post* when he resigned that July.

Dixon was able to conduct a partial autopsy, overseen by Grauman, but he did it grudgingly. Helene Karpa, the president of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Washington, wrote in a letter to the editor of *The Post* that Dixon’s remark was “shockingly callous.”

“While we did not wish to hamper the police investigation in any way, it was only appropriate to see to it that Rabbi Rabinowitz, a pious Orthodox Jew and rabbi of Keshet Israel in Georgetown, be treated in death by the principles that he lived in life,” Karpa wrote. “Jewish law and tradition regard the human body as the receptacle that holds the holiest of all things — a human life.”

MANY KESHERITES, as they call themselves, remember exactly where they were when they received the call that Rabinowitz was dead. They can pinpoint it with specificity, in the same way that others recall the moment they learned that hijacked planes flew into the Twin Towers.

Gerard Leval was in a conference room at a Baltimore law firm hammering out the details of a deal. Someone interrupted the meeting and asked him to come to the phone, where he learned the rabbi had died.

He quickly wrapped up the meeting and got in his car to drive back to Washington.

Reuven Eliaz worked at the Israeli Embassy up Connecticut Avenue, and as soon as he heard the news, he took the embassy's security officer to the crime scene. They were concerned it might have been terrorism. Eleven years earlier, the Israeli military attaché in Washington was shot to death in his driveway in Chevy Chase, Md. That crime also remains unsolved. But detectives investigating Rabinowitz's death would quickly rule out antisemitism as a motivation when they reached the conclusion that the murderer was likely someone the rabbi knew.

Others, like synagogue board vice president Irving Haber, have buried the memory over the years. "Unlike when Kennedy was killed, I don't remember the moment. It was so traumatic. It was so personal that I don't remember how I found out," Irving told *J* recently.

What everyone does remember is that, regardless of how they learned the news, they responded in the same way. They came to Keshet. All day long, people came. Over 150 people were at *ma'ariv*, the evening prayer service, which usually drew the bare minimum of 10 men.

By then, the autopsy was completed and Rabinowitz's body had been moved to the funeral home. A group of men went there after *ma'ariv* to keep *shmirah*.

According to Jewish tradition, Jews must keep *shmirah*, or guard, over the dead — it's a crucial step in shepherding a person's soul from this life to the world to come, as well as a sign of respect for the person and their family. Usually, this task involves sitting next to the coffin and reading psalms. Observant Jews hold a funeral as quickly as they can, sometimes just hours after a person dies. In the event a funeral must fall the next day, the *shomrim*, or guards, stay with the body all through the day and night.

"We were supposed to read *tehillim* [psalms], and I couldn't. I just stumbled," Eliaz said recently. It was too hard.

THE NEXT MORNING, many congregants again gathered at the synagogue, a three-story brown-brick edifice on a residential corner in Georgetown, located between a pale-green

townhouse and a white one, which now houses the synagogue's offices. The bay windows are filled with a green stained glass that looks almost like tie-dye, which one Keshet member says was likely less an aesthetic choice than a financial one: It was less expensive than the elaborate stained-glass artwork now common at American synagogues. A mold of the Twin Tablets with the Ten Commandments sits above the windows on the side of the building.

It's important to know what Keshet looks like from the outside because for many people who came to honor the rabbi, it's all they saw that morning. Inside was standing room only, and anyone who was not a synagogue member was asked to stand outdoors. The rabbi's students, friends and admirers snaked onto the redbrick sidewalks. Loudspeakers were set up so that the outside crowds could hear the service and the eulogies. Hundreds of people attended the funeral.

"We were all like siblings, all *mishpocha* [family], huddling together," said Sara Averick, who was a young Keshet member at the time.

Inside, the coffin had been brought to the upstairs balcony. The funeral started early to ensure that Rabinowitz's body would arrive at Dulles International Airport in time for a noon flight to New York, and then a flight to Israel, where he would be buried next to his wife. (Two hundred people, mostly former students, attended the burial at Eretz Hachaim Cemetery in Beit Shemesh, Israel.) When the hearse left the synagogue, mourners ran alongside it for two blocks.

Prominent local rabbis shared heartfelt, painful eulogies. An assistant to President Ronald Reagan brought condolences from the White House. Israeli Ambassador Meir Rosenne spoke; two years earlier, Keshet had been Rosenne's very first stop when he arrived in Washington. Upon landing, the diplomat went straight to the synagogue from the airport to say *Kaddish* for a *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the death of a loved one.

Rabbi Gedaliah Anemer, a close friend of Rabinowitz and a fellow Orthodox rabbi, stood just outside the synagogue's main doors, which were left open. As a *Kohen*, a descendant of the Jewish priests, Anemer could not be in the same room as the body. (Jewish law says that *Kohanim* cannot have

contact with corpses.) So he delivered his eulogy via a public address system. "He gave of himself; he gave of his soul; he gave of his essence," Anemer said of Rabinowitz.

Remembrances poured in for weeks, published in synagogue bulletins and shared at Shabbat services.

"When I came to Georgetown the shul was at a low point in its fortunes, and there is no question that Rabbi Rabinowitz's determination kept it alive, and that he led it to its present remarkable renaissance," the Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Herman Wouk wrote in a remembrance. "For me he will always be the rabbi."

Grauman, the congregant who handled the autopsy, gave the final eulogy. He used his remarks to tell the hundreds of people in the room — the largest crowd ever at Keshet — that the matter is in God's hands, and not in the domain of man, even as a police investigation was already underway.

"For those who understood it, I think it really helped them understand that we may be powerless, we may have no control over the situation, and that will be frustrating," Grauman said later. "There will not be closure here. That's the word that everybody was using: closure. There won't be closure, because we will not be able to close it. But *Hashem Yinakem Damo*." God will avenge his blood.

This was one day after Rabinowitz was murdered, and though emotional closure could never come, the hundreds of people gathered at Keshet that day still had hope the police would bring a suspect to justice. In conversations with Keshet congregants, police confidently insisted they would swiftly apprehend the suspect.

In fact, several people left the funeral feeling that the killer had been among them that day. ♦